

INFORMATION REPORT INFORMATION REPORT

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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[Redacted] study on Turkmen and its capital city, Ashkhabad. The study includes information on such subjects as water supplies, industry, agriculture, traffic and transport routes.

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November, 1962

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Survey of the
Capital of
Turkmenistan
Ashkhabad

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With a Town Plan of Ashkhabad

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B. Data on the capital of Turkmenistan

A s h k h a b a d

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1. Position and Development of the town of Ashkhabad

Ashkhabad is situated 25 miles ^(=40 km) from the frontier of Iran, on the northern spurs of the Kopet-Dag mountains. The climate is definitely continental with very hot, dry summers and temperatures of up to 113° Fahrenheit ^(=45°C) in the shade.

Prior to Russian conquest Ashkhabad was only a small Turkmen village, which has however completely disappeared as a result of the development of the town. As the tsarist Russians had considerable difficulty in conquering Turkmenistan, and the tsarist army as well as the Russian colonial officials were constantly attacked by the Turkmen people, the tsarist government in 1881 erected a fortress for the tsarist soldiers near to the original village of Ashkhabad. From here part of the country was to be kept under control. Incidentally, it was only in 1881 ^(=45 km) that the fortress of the Teke-Turkmen, Göktepe (28 miles northwest of Ashkhabad), fell after having been besieged by 7,000 Russians.

Within a few years a small town, which was definitely colonial in character, was built round this fortress in Ashkhabad, the ruins of which still exist today in the form of a hill known as "Fortress Hill". This new town was essentially a Russian town, for there was hardly any Turkmen population. As early as 1888 Ashkhabad already became the capital of the Trans-Caspian region. That same year the Ashkhabad Railway, which had been constructed for purely military reasons and extended along the northern flank of Chorassan, was completed.

At that time Ashkhabad already had a large Russian garrison. In addition, there was also an administrative centre. Con-

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sequently and also as a result of the completion of the railway, the town steadily grew in size. It was inhabited mainly by Russians, but Poles, Armenians, Tatars and others also came to Ashkhabad as artisans, railway workers, demobilized soldiers, etc. The Turkmen population refused to live in Ashkhabad amongst these foreigners, whom they regarded with animosity, and preferred to live, not in the town, but in their own settlements outside Ashkhabad. For this reason there are no old and new parts of the town in Ashkhabad as for instance in Tashkent and Bokhara, where the Turkestanian population lives in the old parts of the town. True, prior to and after World War II more Turkmen have settled in Ashkhabad than was formerly the case, but even today the majority of the population consists of Russians and various other peoples.

During and after the Russian October revolution of 1917 Ashkhabad was one of the centres of resistance against the Bolsheviks. In the summer of 1919 Ashkhabad was seized by the Bolsheviks, but the Turkmen continued to put up an armed resistance in the more remote regions until 1928. Even in the years that followed clashes occurred again and again between the Russians and the Turkmen people.

In 1919 Ashkhabad was renamed Poltoratsk, but in 1927 it received its old name again. In 1924 Ashkhabad became the capital of the newly created Soviet Republic of Turkmenistan.

In 1948 a heavy earthquake occurred, during which most of Ashkhabad was destroyed. The centre of the town and the district round the railway station in particular were badly damaged. The Soviets then began to rebuild the town on the old plans.

At the last census in 1959 the population of Ashkhabad already numbered 170,000 inhabitants, and it can be assumed that this figure has increased still more during the past few years, since industry there is constantly being expanded.

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NO FOREIGN DISSEM2. The Character of the Town of Ashkhabad

Ashkhabad is a typically modern Russian town with straight, wide, tree-lined streets and white houses built in a plain style. Its appearance is by no means in keeping with the typical aspect of a Turkestanian town. After the earthquake of 1948 most of the dwelling-houses were only built one storey high, and the majority of public buildings do not have more than two storeys. Numerous Party and government buildings, as for instance the House of the Ministerial Council and the building of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan, have been built in such a lavish style that they remind one of the stations on the underground railway in Moscow. But this is a style which is entirely alien to the Turkestanian people.

As the Party, economic and cultural centre of Turkmenistan, Ashkhabad is populated for the most part by civil servants, officials and functionaries, as well as by persons in the military services. The administrative centre is located in the vicinity of the old fortress. The Ploschchad (= square) Karla Marksa and the Ulitsa (= street) Gogolevskaja constitute the heart of the town. The residential districts are situated in the vicinity of the railway station, which lies in the northeast part of the town and is the largest railway station in the five Soviet Republics of Turkestan. During recent years the town has expanded above all towards the southeast and north. In the north the town borders on the Kara-Kum desert and is only separated from it by a wide belt of orchards.

Ashkhabad possesses a very big garrison and a large military administration. These are both located mainly in the vicinity of the old fortress.

As the cultural centre of the Soviet Republic of Turkmenistan,

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Ashkhabad possesses a state university - the old and new 50X1 Gorky University, the Academy of Sciences founded in 1951, and several institutes. In addition, it also has an opera and a ballet theatre, several Russian and Turkmen theatres, cinemas, clubs and assembly halls.

As can be seen from the enclosed map of the town, all the streets and squares in Ashkhabad, as in other Turkestanian towns, have Russian names.

C. The Traffic and Transport Routes of Ashkhabad
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The region in and around Ashkhabad belongs to the officially prohibited zone which foreigners may only enter by special permission of Moscow.

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Ashkhabad is an important traffic and transport centre and a big trans-shipment centre for goods. If one considers the relatively remote position of Ashkhabad in the extreme south of Turkestan near to the Iranian frontier and also its relatively insignificant industry as compared to other Turkestanian towns and industrial areas, then it seems surprising that Ashkhabad should have the largest railway station in the five Soviet Republics of Turkestan. It is obvious from this fact that solely military and not economic or traffic and transport reasons have been decisive in this respect. For Ashkhabad is neither a railway junction, nor are the town and the hinterland of such industrial importance

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as to justify the existence of the largest railway station in the five Soviet Republics of Turkestan. It is solely the exposed position of Ashkhabad as the centre of a frontier republic of the Soviet Union that justifies the size and expansion of the railway site of Ashkhabad.

1. Railway Routes from Ashkhabad

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Ashkhabad is a railway station on the so-called Ashkhabad Railway, which proceeds from Kizil-Su (= Krasnovodsk) on the Caspian Sea via the towns of Merv and Chardshoj and links up with the Tashkent Railway at Sijauddin (= Siadin). Thus Ashkhabad is connected by rail in the west with the Caspian Sea and in the northeast, via Tashkent, with the general railway network of the Soviet Union.

The Ashkhabad Railway, which runs parallel to the Iranian and Afghan frontiers, is of considerable importance as regards the transport of reinforcements and supplies for the Red Army on account of its position. In this respect Ashkhabad as the capital of Turkmenistan plays a particularly important part since the town possesses a large garrison and military administration. The station is situated in the southeast of the town.

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NO FOREIGN DISSEM2. The Road Network of Ashkhabad

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From Ashkhabad a good road proceeds in a southerly direction via the Kopet-Dag mountains to Meshed in Iran. This is the most important traffic route from Turkmenistan to Iran and during World War II in particular it was of great importance for allied transports, which proceeded to the Soviet Union via Iran. Today this road plays an important part as regards trade between the Soviet Union and Iran.

In addition, there is a good motor road from Ashkhabad in a southwesterly direction to the summer resort of Firyuza. Firyuza, which is about 25 miles ^(~40 Km) away from Ashkhabad, is situated on the Iranian frontier, and for this reason this road is of additional importance. In addition to summer residences and a sanatorium, Firyuza also possesses a convalescent and a holiday home of the Red Army, which is situated in a large park.

All the roads which lead from Ashkhabad in a southerly direction to the Iranian frontier and to Iran have to proceed via the Kopet-Dag mountains, which constitute a considerable obstacle since they reach an altitude of about 9,000 feet. ^(~3000 m)

From Ashkhabad and proceeding in a northerly direction there is a motor road, which was only recently widened, to the town of Serny-Savod. Serny-Savod is situated about 160 miles ^(~250 Km)

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from Ashkhabad in a northerly direction, in the heart of the Kara-Kum desert. There are large sulphur deposits and a big chemical combine in Serny-Savod. In order to ensure a more rapid transport of raw materials and products from Serny-Savod the original road which led there from Ashkhabad was widened and converted into a motor road. Beyond Serny-Savod the original road continues in a northerly direction via Chiva to Urgentsh (on the Amu Darya). This connection by road from Ashkhabad to Chiva via Serny-Savod crosses the Kara-Kum desert in a south to north direction, and thus various obstacles have to be overcome.

In addition, Ashkhabad also possesses a large number of roads of local importance which in recent years have constantly been widened and improved as a result of the construction of the Kara-Kum canal. These roads link up the surrounding industrial and agricultural districts with the capital of Turkmenistan and ensure a rapid transport of goods.

3. Air Lines from Ashkhabad

Ashkhabad possesses a modern airport. Moscow, Baku, Tashkent, Duchambe and all the larger towns of Turkmenistan can easily be reached by plane from Ashkhabad.

4. The Kara-Kum Canal

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To sum up, the Kara-Kum Canal, which proceeds from the Amu Darya in a westerly direction via the rivers Murgab and Tedzhen and continues via Ashkhabad as far as the town of Archman (a railway station on the Ashkhabad Railway west of Ashkhabad) and has a total length of about 580 miles^(= 424 km), is not only of importance to agriculture but also plays a significant part as a transport route in the vicinity of the Afghan and Iranian frontiers. The canal is 90 - 120 feet wide^(= 30-40 m) and can easily be used by heavy freighters. The southern frontier of the Soviet Union thus possesses an additional traffic and transport route.

When K h r u s h c h o v during his visit to Turkmenistan inspected the Kara-Kum Canal on September 27, 1962, he himself said that it was not a canal in the strictest sense but, rather, a huge lake navigable by large ships. And by this statement he was stressing its economic, political and military significance.

The first section of the canal, with a length of 250 miles, connects the well-watered River Amu Darya with the River Murgab and was completed in 1959. The second section, which connects the rivers Murgab and Tedzhen and has a length of 80 miles^(= 130 km) (some statistics give 87 miles^(= 140 km)), was originally not to be completed until 1962. But since the Russians attach so much importance to this canal, construction was speeded up to such an extent and more machines and workers were employed so that this section was already completed by November 1960. Work on the third section of the canal, which proceeds from the River Tedzhen along the Ashkhabad Railway to Ashkhabad, commenced at the end of 1961.

This waterway is of considerable importance to Ashkhabad since it constitutes an additional traffic and transport route in the south of the Soviet Union. Moreover, it affords

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an additional supply of water for the town and the surrounding districts. This fact is, incidentally, constantly stressed by the Soviet authorities, but it has by no means been the decisive reason for the construction of the canal; for the northern slopes and spurs of the Kopet-Dag mountains have always been well-watered. A fact which is obvious from the extensive agriculture - above all, the cultivation of fruit and vegetables - in this region. The decisive factor which led to the construction of the Kara-Kum Canal is the significance of the additional traffic and transport route which it constitutes. And this was also stressed by K h r u s h c h o v himself during his recent tour of inspection of the canal.

D. Industry in Ashkhabad

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Today Ashkhabad is an important industrial centre. As a result of the extensive agricultural districts in the vicinity of the town, the food and clothing industries have for years played an important part in Ashkhabad. Since World War II and above all in recent years these industries have been expanded very considerably and also modernized. Mention must be made in particular of the very big and modern meat combine, which is supplied with meat from the cattle-raising districts in the vicinity. In addition, Ashkhabad also possesses mills, breweries and distilleries.

The cotton grown in the districts surrounding Ashkhabad is processed and worked up in the town itself, where there are

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ginning factories, spinning mills and an extensive clothing industry. In 1961 a modern factory which turns out ready-made clothes was opened. In addition, there are also leather and shoe factories as well as a silk mill in Ashkhabad.

Ashkhabad is also a centre of the metal processing industry. It possesses big repair-works for diesel engines and machine factories which make machines and engines driven by crude oil, as well as a factory which produces agricultural machines, a factory which makes cinematographic apparatus, and a motor repair works.

The lime deposits in the neighbourhood supply the raw materials needed by the lime and brick works in Ashkhabad, which in their turn supply the town with building materials to an ever-increasing extent. A new brick works was recently opened in Ashkhabad. The big sulphur deposits in Serny-Savod, 160 miles to the north of Ashkhabad, supply the sulphur works there. The sulphur combine in Serny-Savod is however considerably larger and more modern than the sulphur works in Ashkhabad and constitutes a modern industrial centre for the chemical industry. All the products manufactured in Serny-Savod have to be transported via Ashkhabad.

The glass factory in Ashkhabad, which was only expanded and modernized in recent years, plays a leading part in the manufacture of glassware.

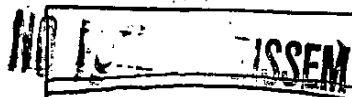
In conclusion it must be stressed that the constantly expanding industry of Ashkhabad is becoming more and more important and is transforming the capital of Turkmenistan, which is already an administrative and military town, into an industrial town as well.

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